Selecting and Training
Long Range Surveillance Unit Commanders

CAPTAIN DAVID A. MCBRIDE

The command of a long range surveillance (LRS) unit is a unique and challenging duty assignment. The execution of the LRS mission can be very complex, because it calls for infiltrating teams up to 50 kilometers behind enemy lines, avoiding detection for prolonged periods of time, locating and observing specific targets, transmitting manually encrypted messages over high frequency (HF) burst radio, and extracting teams, all without being detected. Needless to say, it takes an officer with special training and experience to orchestrate training plans and execute operations for such a unit.

On the basis of my experience as an LRS unit commander in a light division and as the senior LRS detachment observer-controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), I feel qualified to comment on the selection and training of LRS commanders. This experience came from direct interaction with and observation of all the light division LRS detachments coming through JRTC, and from the Long-Range Surveillance Leaders Course at Fort Benning, Georgia.

The division LRS unit, although part of a military intelligence battalion or cavalry squadron, is a combination of infantrymen and communicators. LRS detachment command is an infantry position by TOE (tables of organization and equipment), but some divisions have selected cavalry or military intelligence officers instead.

Each division has its own method of selecting LRS detachment commanders. In some divisions, candidates are nominated by the battalion commander, screened by the assistant division commander for support, and finally selected by the division commander. Other units make their selections at lower levels. The importance placed on selecting the best-qualified captains for the job often determines how willing brigade and battalion commanders are to give up such officers.

Several factors go into the selection

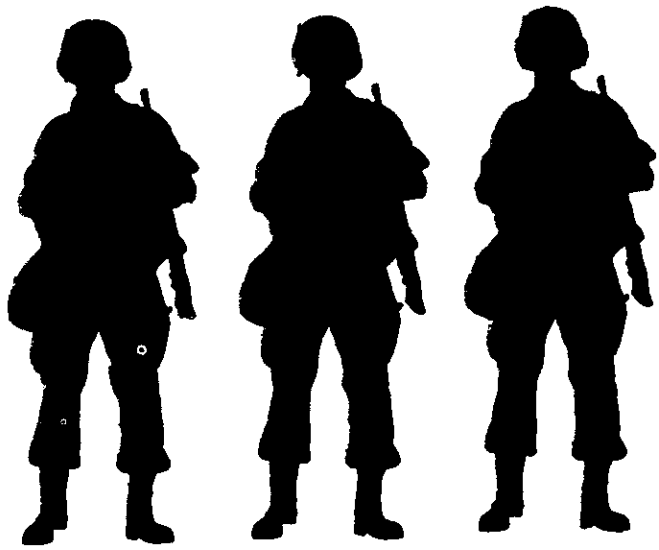
of an LRS detachment commander, including the priority that leaders place on filling the position, the availability of qualified infantry officers within the division, and the availability of qualified military intelligence or cavalry officers from the host battalion. The important thing is to select an officer on the basis of his background, not necessarily his branch.

An LRS commander should have had prior company command, airborne assignments, small unit leadership experience, and such special training as Ranger School, the Special Forces Qualification Course, and the Jumpmaster Course. It is possible, of course, for an LRS detachment commander to learn the necessary skills after he takes command, but one who already has the experience can more effectively plan, coordinate, and execute training for his unit from the beginning. The extent of his responsibilities may not allow him the time he needs to catch up.

In addition to becoming accustomed to an entirely different type of unit in a military intelligence battalion or cavalry squadron, the commander must also become familiar with the command relationships he will have with the G-2 and other members of the division staff.

An LRS unit is under the operational control of the G-2 and is co-located with the division main command post. LRS missions are proposed to the division command group by the G-2, and support is required from a variety of key division staff members, including the G-2, the G-3, the division signal officer, the division aviation liaison officer, and the division headquarters commandant. These command and staff relationships are normally exercised only during division command post exercises (CPXs) and field training exercises (FTXs). The rest of the time, an LRS detachment may support the more frequent brigade or battalion FTXs, each of which is unique in that the LRS commander must deal with different people on the different staffs.

Since an LRS detachment is not designed to be employed as a slice element, the entire detachment headquarters is often employed along with the



LRS teams. This may be why the LRS detachment commander deploys more often and is involved with more external training exercises than any other commander in the division.

In a light division, the LRS detachment is usually the only unit on jump status. This is the reason the LRS commander must have a background that includes airborne operations and jumpmaster qualification. It is also helpful if his background includes leadership positions in airborne, Ranger, special forces, or other types of units that emphasize small unit (squad-size) operations. He must train his LRS team leaders to operate on their own, and he must be able to plan and execute training that supports these independent operations.

Training LRS detachment soldiers is not an easy task. The team leader (a staff sergeant) and the assistant team leader (a sergeant), at the very least, should be graduates of the Airborne, Ranger, and Long-Range Surveillance Leaders Courses. These NCOs must then train their teams to become experts at infiltration techniques, HF communications, vehicle identification, advanced first aid, survival, and a variety of other skills. This means that the commander must be at least as well trained as the noncommissioned officers so that he can make sure the standards are being maintained.

The Long-Range Surveillance Leaders Course (LRSLC) is essential for a prospective new commander, as well as for a more experienced commander. It concentrates on LRS doctrine, infiltration and exfiltration techniques, HF communications, vehicle identification, order of battle, survival, and patrolling techniques. The course provides an excellent way to round out the new commander's experience and ensure that his unit is up to date on the latest doctrine, techniques, and equipment.

Unfortunately, though, experience at the JRTC has indicated that too few commanders attend this course. In fact, since the LRS detachment observer-controller team was created in November 1989, not one commander rotating through JRTC has been a graduate of the LRSLC. Yet nearly half of the team leaders who rotate through JRTC have attended the course. This inequity creates problems, because unit SOPs often have shortcomings that the commanders do not deal with simply because they lack the necessary knowledge—knowledge that the team leaders (and others who have attended the course) often have.

The greatest effect of failing to attend the course has been on planning and preparing for LRS missions at the JRTC, where poorly planned missions frequently fail. Specifically, mission target folders are inadequately prepared before being issued to team leaders. This is often caused by a poor understanding of the requirements for mission planning and by a failure to com-

prehend the standards necessary to ensure the survival of the team and the accomplishment of the mission. Attending the LRS course cannot guarantee success for a commander and his unit, but it does offer them a better chance at success.

Commanding an LRS detachment is an exciting and challenging opportunity. The unique mission and the fast pace of such a unit demand that the commander have a background that enables him to begin immediately to plan, coordinate, and execute training. The commander should have small unit experience and previous company command; he should understand what it takes to be on one of the teams; and he should take the Long-Range Surveillance Leaders Course to round out his experience. The proper selection and training of an LRS detachment commander will ensure that the unit is well led, well trained, and capable of accomplishing its mission in combat and getting the teams out alive.

Captain David A. McBride served as senior LRS detachment observer-controller at the JRTC, commanded an LRS detachment in the 25th Infantry Division, and completed the Long-Range Surveillance Leaders Course. He is a 1982 graduate of the United States Military Academy and is now assistant S-3, 4th Ranger Training Battalion, at Fort Benning.

SWAP SHOP

THE ROLLOVER PRONE PISTOL FIRING POSITION

The prone pistol firing technique is often neglected during small arms practice and qualification, yet this position provides the smallest silhouette and the most stable firing platform. Still, the position described in Field Manual 23-35 has three disadvantages (Photo 1):

First, the firer's neck muscles are strained when his head is forced back so he can see the target, and this muscle fatigue is compounded by the weight and shape of his helmet. If he moves his head to relax his neck, he takes his eyes off the target. Second, his arms are unsupported, which causes an unstable firing position that leads to inaccurate fire. Third, when he raises his head to see the target, he presents a higher silhouette.

A better way to fire while prone is from the rollover prone position. This position is similar to the one described in the manual in that the firer's body is flat on the ground with both arms straight out toward the direction of fire. Once in this position, though, he rolls onto the shoulder on his strong (shooting) side and supports his face on his shooting arm (Photo 2). Then he rests his firing hand on the ground, creating a stable base for the weapon. Shooting from this position causes no muscle fatigue and allows the firer to concentrate on the target.

This position can be trained as part of an individual movement technique, following these steps: With the pistol in his strong hand, the soldier drops to both knees from the standing position. He starts to fall forward, using his non-firing hand to break the fall (Photo 3). Then he extends his firing hand forward and rolls over into the correct firing position (Photo 4). A soldier should master this technique with an unloaded weapon before attempting it with ammunition.

I recommend that the rollover prone position be integrated into M9 pistol training, practice fire, and qualification. Since the manual does not prescribe a firing position for qualification, it is also possible to designate several engagements from the prone to add to the realism during pistol qualification.

Photo 1

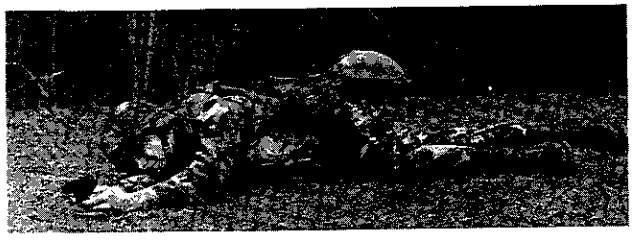


Photo 2

Photo 3

Photo 4

(Submitted by Captain Thomas E. Beron, who commanded Company E, 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry, at Fort Benning, Georgia.)